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OPINION - Guest writer

All can thrive

Disabled workers play vital role

by Alan McLain Special to the Democrat-Gazette | Today at 3:17 a.m.

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A state's backbone is its economy, having a profound effect on every citizen. A strong, stable work force is the basis of a healthy economy, and that work force must be an inclusive one where people with skills and talent, including individuals with disabilities, can thrive.

While some might not fully consider the contributions of those with disabilities in the workplace, let me offer a few names for consideration: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Stephen Hawking, Stevie Wonder, and Frida Kahlo, just to name a few. These people can be considered some of the most inspirational figures in history, and each of them had a disability.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and this year's theme is "The Right Talent, Right Now." The 2019 theme emphasizes the essential role that people with disabilities play in America's economic success, especially in an era when historically low unemployment and global competition are creating a high demand for skilled talent.

Every day, we see the talent that individuals with disabilities add to our work force, but this is the time of year when we want to spotlight their value to our state and our economy.

Observed annually in October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month celebrates America's workers with disabilities both past and present, and emphasizes the importance of inclusive policies and practices to ensure that all Americans who want to work can work, and have access to services and supports to enable them to do so.

With continued advances in such supports, including accessible technology, it is easier than ever before for America's employers to hire people with disabilities in high-demand jobs.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month traces its beginnings to 1945, when Congress declared the first week in October "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week."

In 1962, the use of the word "physically" ceased in order to include individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to National Disability Employment Month.

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, of the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services, within the Arkansas Department of Commerce, is the state vocational rehabilitation agency. Our focus is meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities as customers, responding to the needs of businesses, improving public agency collaboration, collaborating with community partners, and informing and shaping federal-state policy and practice.

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